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**Sen. Hammerstrom cautions opponents to deal in facts**  
*Legislation to close the gap between mental and physical health insurance coverage on floor of Michigan Senate*

**LANSING** – In lobbying state senators to reject Senate Bills 229 and 230, the Michigan Chamber of Commerce continues its blatant support of stigmatizing individuals with mental illness.

Senate Bills 229 and 230, introduced by Sen. Beverly S. Hammerstrom, R-Temperance, seek to end the discrimination of mental illness under health insurance coverage by requiring health insurance providers that cover such conditions to do so at the same levels as physical illnesses.

After many years, the bills were successfully reported from the Senate Health Policy Committee on May 31 and await a vote on the Senate floor. Opponents to the bills, clearly agitated by the strong committee support, have geared up their opposition.

“The chamber must think senators are stupid and incapable of doing their homework,” Hammerstrom said. “They rely on scare tactics and outdated, estimated numbers. Members have information about 39 other states that have mental health parity with real figures about the impact on insurance premiums as well as demonstrated savings to employers.”

Although they never cite actual studies or data in any of the materials they send out, while testifying in committee, the chamber relied on a report issued in 2000 that utilizes 1996 figures to estimate increases of between 1 percent and 4 percent in health care premiums if mental health parity is enacted.

Using experience from other states, many studies have been done since and do not agree with the chamber's inflated claims that the legislation will kill jobs and cause people to go uninsured. The latest and most extensive information comes from a study completed by Harvard University and published last month in the New England Journal of Medicine that looked at 20,000 members of the Federal Employees Health Benefit Program. The study clearly indicates any potential increase in health insurance premium is less than one half of one percent.

"The numbers debate can go on and on," Hammerstrom commented. "The bottom line is that no state that has parity laws has repealed them, and in fact, many have enhanced their laws because the benefits of parity offset any minimal cost issues. The chamber and other organizations who want to attack these bills should have enough respect for my colleagues to deal in facts."

The chamber also continues to refer to the bills as a mandate although the language clearly does not mandate coverage, but clarifies that if mental health coverage is offered, it may not have artificial limits, compared to physical health coverage.

"Mental health parity bills do not mandate anything but an end to the stigma and fear that continue to allow us to discriminate against people with a certain type of illness," said Dr. Judith Kovach, co-chair of Partners for Parity.

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